
From: Steuteville, William
Sent: Monday, September 18, 2017 1:04 PM
To: Mason, Steve; Touw, Steve
Subject: NRCC ESF10 Desk Harvey Lessons
Attachments: NRCC ESF10 Desk Harvey LL WDS 9-18-17.docx

Hi Steve and Steve,

Attached are my draft observations and lesson learned from staffing the NRCC on 9/1-4/17. Wanted to run them by you both to make sure they didn't cause any heartburn....let me know or other suggestions. Thanks Bill

Subject: Lessons learned from NRCC deployment for the Hurricane Harvey

From: Bill Steuteville, Regional Homeland Security Coordinator
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To: Gilberto Irizarry, Director
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CC: Bonnie Gross, Associate Director
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Issue:

The following are my observations and suggestions (lessons learned) based upon my experiences staffing the ESF10 Desk at the FEMA National Response Coordination Center during the Hurricane Harvey response on September 1, 2, 3 and 4, 2017.

Background:

Harvey made landfall in Texas as a Level 4 Hurricane on August 25 and continued to pound Texas for the next 5 days causing extensive flooding and other damage in Texas and Louisiana due to unprecedented rainfall. FEMA determined that Harvey was a “Level 1 Disaster” and activated the FEMA National Response Coordination Center in Washington, DC as the **primary point of coordination** for Federal disaster support to the impacted states. This meant the Federal response support would be led from the FEMA’s National HQ in Washington rather than the FEMA Region VI office in Denton Texas. [I believe this is the first time there has been a **Level 1 Disaster** since this policy took effect. This is the first time this new protocol has been implemented by FEMA. It has been exercised before but never tested live.]

EPA HQ staffed the NRCC two 12 hour shifts for the first week. EPA OEM was also staffing the HQ EOC with a full, or nearly full, EOC desk team. By the end of the first week, OEM was facing a shortage of volunteers over the long Labor Day weekend. OEM requested that EPA Regions II & III provide support staffing the NRCC. RII OSC Steve Touw and I were assigned and deployed to Washington, DC to staff the NRCC. Steve Touw took the night shift starting August 30 at 8pm. I took the day shift starting September 1 at 8am. We rotated days and nights through the evening of September 4. Steve Touw was replaced at the NRCC ESF10 desk the morning of September 5 by EPA HQ personnel.

On 9/1/17, I arrived at the NRCC at approximately 8am. Steve Touw gave me a short brief of what he had experienced and his contributions to the SitRep. He said there was interest in the Arkema Site and the status of drinking water facilities. But he did not have detailed situational awareness of Arkema and water facilities to pass along. He said my main POC was the EPA HQ Liaison officer (consistent with EPA ICS dogma). The HQ EOC was not staffed except the night duty officer so he hadn’t had much interaction with EPA EOC at night. The USCG was staffing the USCG ESF10 desk chair during the days only. The USCG rep immediately focused on the SitRep and FEMA WebEOC inputs required of ESF10. I focused on learning the lay of the land. I was immediately asked questions about DW/WW facilities, Arkema, and, by afternoon, the status of impacted Superfund Sites. These three issues continued to be the primary areas of concern for the entire four days. In particular, NRCC staff wanted constant updates on the City of Beaumont drinking water treatment plant.

Before I get into the particulars, challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations, I want to acknowledge five people who provided invaluable support to me during the NRCC assignment. I couldn't have done the job without their help. The five are: PO Justin Hoffer, USCG; Lt. Meagan Bowis, USCG; OSC Steve Mason, R6; Andrew Waite, R6 Water Program; and OSC Steve Touw, R2.

The Coasties (both from USCG HQ) kept the basic daily function of the ESF10 desk going. They filed the SitRep and Senior Leadership Brief (SLB) information on time, answered the phones and made sure I got to meetings on time. They dug for information I needed. They were also assigned a significant amount of USCG work not directly related to ESF10 desk. They did it all with good humor. They were great.

Steve Mason and Andrew Waite were my "go to" contacts when I absolutely needed up to date field information and needed it immediately. They didn't always have what I needed but they were the best source of information I had. I tried not to bother them with anything less than critical requests. They were my only source of accurate, up to date information on critical issues of interest to leadership at the NRCC: Arkema, Beaumont water supply, and the status of impacted Superfund Sites. I wished I had reached out to them sooner.

Steve Touw figured out what was what at the NRCC. He took the time at night to really look at what we were reporting in the SitRep and SLB and how decide we could edit and improve it. Before Steve left every morning he updated WebEOC with the latest information for the pm SitRep. That meant we were ahead of the curve on information input at least in the beginning of the day.

So, thank you Meagan, Justin, Steve, Andrew and Steve!

Experiences & Lessons Learned:

Situational Awareness – I began my shift on 9/1 with only a little more knowledge of the ESF10 Harvey response than what I was seeing on TV. I did not receive specific information on hot issues of general deployment. My POC at the EPA EOC had little more information. I was not able to answer simple questions about EPA's involvement in the Arkema response. I didn't know anything specific what EPA was doing with respect to DW and WW facilities. By the second day, I was reaching out to Steve Mason in R6 for the critical issues. He was a great help. He put me in touch with Andrew Waite in R6 Water office. Andrew gave me enough information on the status of DW/WW facilities to convince folks that EPA was on top of it. But I was not able to reach him on day four (I think he was off work.) Other units in the NRCC had more up to date information about what EPA was doing but it was often inaccurate. We were caught off guard and unawares by the decision at the Arkema site to conduct a controlled burn, the decision to delay it, the decision to go ahead again, and, ultimately, initiation of the controlled burn was a surprise again despite assurances that we would be informed ahead of the final burn. We learned of these events through others at the NRCC

NRCC Battle Rhythm – I was unfamiliar with NRCC daily operations and what was expected of EPA. I was unprepared for the Senior Leadership VTC. I was not aware that I was expected to brief out on EPA/ESF10 activities before senior reps of the ESFs, the FEMA administrator, the White House and two dozen other locations around the country. Many of those speaking were flag officers or Assistant Secretaries of their agencies. I wasn't prepared but managed with help from the USCG ESF10 rep. I was unable to answer follow-up questions to my briefing points. I was asked by the FEMA Administrator whether EPA was on scene at the Arkema site. I didn't know. The R6 FEMA Regional Administrator

came to my rescue stating that an EPA Federal OSC was on scene working with state and local officials. On days 2, 3 and 4, I was better prepared to brief the Senior Leadership VTC but a lack of up to date situational awareness high priority issues was a concern each day.

As far as performing the ESF10 responsibilities, attend meetings, respond to inquiries and provide updates for SitRep and SLB, etc, I could barely keep up with the meetings and inquiries. I couldn't have done that much if the USCG hadn't done all the WebEOC updates and inputs. In reality, only half the day was head spinning, non-stop pressure (between 8 and 2 or 3pm) after the NRCC SitRep update was filed. Between 3 & 5, things were much slower but there were still many questions and RFIs about updating the SLB. After 5 it was really slow.

EPA Harvey IMT SitRep & IAP – On day two, Steve Touw pulled details of where EPA/ESF10 staff was deployed, what resources they had, and what they were doing from the EPA Harvey IMT IAP and SitRep from Response.EPA. The IAP and SitRep are ready sources of great information that doesn't require any direct communication or effort on the part of the impacted Region. We were able to plug this information directly into the NRCC ESF10 SitRep page. It really helped folks at the NRCC with data needs. On day three, the EPA IAP and SitReps weren't posted on Response.EPA until late in the day and we missed the daytime SitRep. I didn't see that they were ever posted on day four. If they are timely posted in Response.EPA the NRCC desk can access them directly and use them for critical information.

Routine Requests – I received dozens of less urgent inquiries on issues other than Arkema, Beaumont and impacted Superfund Sites. These we handled through the EPA HQ EOC, through my past experience, through other known contacts and/or by doing a little web browsing. But this still took time.

Recommendations:

- I. **Situational Awareness:** There are several good/simple ways to improve situational awareness at the ESF10 Desk.
 - a. **Management Reports & Spot Reports.** The ESF10 desk should be on the mailing list for HQ EOC "Management Reports" and "Spot Reports."
 - b. **EPA ESF10 IMT SitReps and IAP.** If the EPA ESF10 IMT SitReps and IAPs are timely posted on Response.EPA, the ESF10 Desk can pull much of the information needed for the NRCC SitRep directly from Response.EPA.
 - c. **Regional Calls & RM calls.** Include ESF10 desk personnel on incident specific Regional calls and RM calls this may help with the hot-issues.
 - d. **Direct link to Region.** The Region should assign a POC for the NRCC ESF10 desk. It could be through the Regional EOC, at the ESF10 desk at NRCC and or JFO or it could be through the LNO at the ESF10 IMT. As noted, I was only able to get timely information through POCs in Region for significant issues.
 - e. **Special Issues.** Over four days there were only three recurring hot issues that NRCC wanted frequent real-time updates for: the Arkema Site, Impacted Superfund Sites, and the Beaumont drinking water plant (with DW and WW facilities in general being a related fourth). It was only for these three/four issues that I needed direct reach back to the Region for up-to-date information. If the Region is aware of the hot issues in the NRCC, it would be a great help to keep the NRCC ESF10 desk up-dated on the hot issues.
- II. **NRCC Battle Rhythm & Staffing:**

- a. **Battle Rhythm Cheat Sheet.** For new ESF10 officers It would be great to have a one- or two-page cheat sheet listing the NRCC schedule of meetings, reports, deadlines and a brief discussion of the EPA/ESF10 responsibilities for each event. At the very least, replacements should know when they are expected to brief the Federal interagency.
- b. **Staffing.** The day shift started at 8am and ran until 8pm (8 to 8 was based upon Central time zone and may shift for other time zones). As far as I know, EPA was the only agency at the NRCC with only one representative during the day shift. Most had three or more representatives. Without the USCG, I couldn't have done the WebEOC updates and the other ESF10 desk duties. Between 8am and 3pm, it was non-stop, head-spinning fast. I think it would have been beneficial to have a third EPA representative at the NRCC to support the day shift and transition. I recommend that they start at 6:30 am to get situational awareness and transitional information from the night shift. They probably would only need to work until 2:30 or 3pm.

III. **NIMS/ICS:**

- a. **Level 1 Disaster** – Historically, the FEMA NRCC provided national level support to the FEMA RRCC but the RRCC remained the focal point for Federal support to the impacted states. Consistent with this the ESF10 desk at the NRCC has been staffed by and reports directly to the EPA HQ EOC. Recently FEMA changed its disaster response management procedures. Now for a Level 1 Disaster, the NRCC assumes leadership for Federal disaster response support until the JFO is fully operational and assumes incident control. However, at EPA, the Region retains primary leadership for EPA response activities under most circumstances. For a Level 1 Disaster, the NRCC essentially replaces the RRCC leadership. EPA should consider where the NRCC ESF10 desk should report to during a FEMA declared Level 1 Disaster, EPA HQ or directly to the Region?